



Earthen Cycle by Brian Rust was created for *Accessibility 2004* with the assistance of community volunteers.

ART THAT DEFINES A COMMUNITY

Sumter's Annual Accessibility Exhibition Series Booth Chilcutt

The city of Sumter is a modest community of nearly forty thousand inhabitants that has recently become home to some of the most innovative and cutting edge art events taking place in South Carolina. Sumter, the exact geographical center of the state, is now also identified as an "epicenter" for the new and avant-garde in the region. The dichotomy of this ostensibly typical southern town, grounded on traditional values and life styles, is that it is also the venue for one of the region's most unique annual art exhibitions that has featured the work of over one hundred and fourteen regional, national and international artists in the southeast's longest running and most successful series of public art installations. This innovative art event, conceived out of curiosity, has evolved into a much anticipated annual exhibition that has garnered both national and international recognition for presenting provocative and engaging art.

In October of 1998, the Sumter County Cultural Commission experimented with installation art during its annual fine arts festival "Fall for the Arts." Peggy Chilcutt, Cultural Commission volunteer, introduced installation art to the Sumter community after viewing installation projects in both Charleston and Columbia. The inaugural project, *Eve a la Carte*, sponsored by the Sumter County Cultural Commission was conceived and organized by Peggy Chilcutt and installed in Sumter's Patriot Hall Performing Arts Center. Chilcutt's project focused on the ubiquitous grocery cart, its multiple functions and incarnations, and involved the work of twelve regional women artists. Chilcutt also conceived and directed the *Eve a la Carte* opening event, which included spoken-word and avant-garde dance. The exhibition and opening event intrigued the attendees who received the opening with humor, curiosity and questions concerning the legitimacy of the

work as art. *Eve a la Carte* had taken the art off the wall and opened the portal.

Plans for the 1999 Fall for the Arts festival included an opportunity for further investigation of installation art. Project directors selected Anne Boudreau, then, adjunct professor of art, USC Columbia, to curate the 1999 installation project. An abandoned downtown Montgomery Ward department store was identified as the venue for the exhibition and Boudreau selected six USC art students, two art professors and a local Sumter artist to produce individual projects that would be installed in the loft-like space of the abandoned building. The Sumter project provided the first opportunity for many of the participating artists to "respond" to a specific space with their artwork. Boudreau named her project *Installations on Main*. The exhibition opened with another avant-garde reception that involved the guests as participants in a thematic perform-

ance art piece titled *The Human Buffet*. Concurrent with Boudreau's exhibition was the second installment of Chilcutt's investigation of the grocery cart.

Now with male artists as participants, *Adam Meets Eve a la Carte*, provided a male-oriented perspective as a continuum of the theme developed in the first project. The exhibition was hosted by Sumter's Patriot Hall Performing Arts Center.

The participation of USC-Sumter's art department in the project initiated an ongoing relationship between the university and the City of Sumter that has resulted in a meaningful collaboration and has



Peggy Chilcutt is co-project director for *Accessibility*.

given credibility and direction to the annual Sumter exhibition.

By 2000 USC's Anne Boudreau was again selected to direct Sumter's installation project which featured the work of twenty five artists that represented a diverse group including USC art department faculty and students, an art professor from South Carolina State University and both full-time and amateur artists. Boudreau's curatorial process, influenced by a very small budget, was limited to using artists that were familiar and available for the exhibition. The artists' works were again installed in the three-story abandoned Montgomery Ward building located on Main Street. Project direc-

tors started using the thematic opening event as a device to 'lure' people downtown to the non-traditional exhibition space and hopefully to encounter the artwork. The ploy proved to be successful as a means to bring an audience to the art.

USC professor of art Chris Robinson was selected to curate Sumter's 2001 project. Robinson was instrumental in providing the project with a much needed focus and direction. Eighteen professional artists and art educators were selected to participate in the exhibition and, for the first time, allowed the artists to move from the old abandoned Montgomery Ward building to sites throughout Sumter's historic downtown area. Robinson introduced the concept of making art accessible to the general public by installing the artwork throughout downtown Sumter where the public would engage the work by chance while they were shopping and conducting everyday business. The exhibition, now titled *Accessibility*, was considered very successful and received critical acclaim. The opening event — Night of 100 Marlyn's — for the 2001 exhibition attracted well over 1000 people and included performance artists, Marilyn Monroe impersonators and live music. The project directors questioned whether many of the event attendees were

fully aware of the artwork that was being exhibited.

Robinson agreed to direct the 2002 *Accessibility* exhibition and made dynamic changes in the format and direction of the project. Robinson selected ten artists for the project and then requested that each artist select another artist bringing the total to twenty participating artists. Many of the new artists, selected by the original ten, were from outside the southeast region including one artist from Canada. Those artists from outside the immediate area had to reside in the Sumter community while they completed and installed their work. This was the first experience with 'outside' artists living and working within the community.

Another major influence by Robinson was to attempt to identify local businesses that would host an *Accessibility* artist and collaborate with that artist to produce a project for the exhibition. This concept, introducing art and the process of the arts into the work place, proved very interesting and was successful with two of the participating artists. Artist, Billy Renkl collaborated with two area businesses — The Copy Shop and owner, Wayne Zamora, to produce a book that documented the experiences of a Hispanic family immigrat-



Soundings by Shaun Cassidy is permanently sited in a once vacant lot on South Main Street. On the same lot is *Mosaic Garden* by Pearl Fryar.



ART THAT DEFINES A COMMUNITY continued

A temporary installation by Mark McLeod for *Accessibility 2001* sited in the former Montgomery Ward Department Store.

ing to the United States and the local newspaper, *The Item*, to print his graphic art in an issue of the daily paper. The other successful collaboration was between USC Columbia ceramic artist Jeremy Davis and a Main Street wig shop. Davis constructed unique ceramic wig displays that were placed in the storefront windows juxtaposed to real merchandise.

Robinson also included an educational component to the month-long exhibition. The educational component involved four weekly discussion sessions that focused on the topics of installation art and contemporary art in general. The venues for these discussion groups varied from private homes to downtown coffee houses and restaurants. The groups were facilitated by USC art professors and included Jeffrey Day, art critic for *The State* newspaper. The groups were very casual and informal and always open for lively discussion, but most importantly, they were informative and educational.

New York artist, Jane Ingram Allen, was invited to submit a proposal for

the 2003 *Accessibility* exhibition.

Allen, an installation artist and curator of both national and international acclaim, was recommended by Columbia, SC installation artist Janet Orselli. Allen's proposal, *From the Outside In*, required that prospective artists first visit the Sumter community and then submit project proposals that were based on their impressions and interpretations of Sumter's culture, history and environment. Their impressions, communicated through site-specific installation art, would be from the perspective of an "outsider" looking into a community. Allen also participated in a month-long, in-school residency that was process driven and focused on developing a collaborative project that featured the work of area students. These works were installed in Sumter's downtown area during the run of the *Accessibility* exhibition.

Allen's theme, which required the visiting artists to define Sumter through their art, and the month-long school residency proved to be very successful on many levels but most importantly she provided a real and viable connection between the art and the

community. The artists' residencies presented opportunities for local residents to meet, socialize and to discuss everything from cultural diversity to art theory and practice with the national and international visitors. Allen selected ten well known installation artists; two from Japan, one from Korea, one from Israel, one from Canada and the remaining five from throughout the United States. The diversity of the participating artists provided an intriguing "snapshot" of the Sumter community. The process driven, labor intensive site-specific art required many extra hands and provided ample opportunities for area residents to gain a real insight on how the art was created while at the same time contributing to its creation.

Site-specific art, by definition, is ephemeral and at best temporary, normally existing for the duration of an exhibition. Two of the *Accessibility 2003* installation artists produced projects that were somewhat permanent. Allen's, *Making My Bed* and Israeli Tova Beck-Friedman's work titled *Chrysalis* remain as a visual reminder of the 2003 exhibition.

The *Accessibility 2004* exhibition — *Space Questions — Art, Nature and Culture of South Carolina* — was curated by Charlie Holmes who selected seven artists to produce site-specific installations that had a specific connection to the culture, history and environment of the Sumter community. Project directors identified this concept as "Sumter-specific" art. Five of the seven were regional artists; one was from New York and one from Korea. Holmes' intent was to begin developing a body of public art for the Sumter community. Four of the 2004 site-specific installations are considered permanent pieces. *Earthen Cycle*, an earthwork by Brian Rust; *Autumn* by Loren Schwerd; *Soundings* by Shaun Cassidy' and Pearl Fryars' *Mosaic Garden* have all become part of

A partnership with the Columbia Museum of Art further extended the reach of Sumter's *Accessibility* project. The Columbia Museum of Art executive director, Karen Brosius agreed to partner with *Accessibility 2004* through the education component of the project. Co-directed by



Chris Robinson, *Accessibility 2001* and 2002 curator

Grant Jackson, Columbia Museum of Art educator, he oversaw a pre-opening event that included a video and panel discussion about installation art and the post-opening weekly discussion groups, one of which was held in Columbia. Brosius and her staff also sponsored a special installation, a sculpture by *Accessibility* artist Brian Rust, in the Columbia Museum of Art.

Accessibility 2005 will be curated by Columbia artist Marcelo Novo. The event will include a month-long residency by Novo and involve concurrent projects that will be totally inclu-

sive, hopefully connecting Sumter's culturally diverse community through the arts. "As a reflection of the increasingly growing Hispanic/Latino population in the Carolinas (as well as in the whole country), *Accessibility 2005* will introduce Latin American art to Sumter," states Novo.

Novo plans to include the work of well-known national and international Hispanic/Latino installation artists in next year's event. Novo further states that "invited artists will become immersed in Sumter's stimulating environment and will create site-specific installations throughout the downtown area."

Novo hopes the project

will "help foster the integration of the state's Hispanic/Latino population into the cultural landscape of the community, and will promote a better understanding between cultures."

Accessibility project directors plan to continue working within the basic theme and framework of "art that defines a community" and will focus on "Sumter-specific" installation art that is truly accessible to the entire community.

Booth Chilcutt is the cultural director of the City of Sumter, SC. and co-project director of *Accessibility*



Marcelo Novo, *Accessibility 2005* curator.
Photo by Jeremy Clark

Sumter's growing collection of accessible public art.

Fryar, a well-known South Carolina topiary artist, was chosen as the resident artist who conducted a month-long project that involved over 450 local middle and high school students. The project, co-directed by Sumter art educator Heidi Adler, is permanently sited in a vacant lot on Sumter's South Main Street.

ACCESSIBILITY 2004 WEB ADDRESS:

www.accessibility2004.com

PROJECT FUNDING

The Sumter County Cultural Commission initiated the Sumter installation project and has remained the main funding agency for the annual event. The City of Sumter became a funding partner during the 2002 *Accessibility* exhibition and has continued their support through funding, logistics and website management. EMS CHEMIE North America became a funding sponsor in 2004 and was the first business in the private sector to contribute financial support for the annual project.

WINNING COMBINATIONS

The *Accessibility* series is a high-profile, community-based event that offers many opportunities for local businesses and organizations to participate at many levels, and share in our efforts of making the arts truly accessible to the residents of the Sumter community. Without partners and sponsors, Accessibility could not have realized its goals and success.

SPONSORS

Sumter County Cultural Commission (funding, logistics, in-school residency; and sponsor for Support Trike project)

City of Sumter (funding, website development/maintenance and logistics)

Sumter Downtown Revitalization Board (funding and special projects)

EMS CHEMIE North America (funding)

PARTNERS

Sumter High School (education component and in-school residency)

The Copy Shop (printing)

The Sumter Gallery of Art (education and special classroom projects)

Columbia Museum of Art (educational component and special projects)

University of South Carolina-Columbia, Media-Arts Department (special events and education component)

Coker College (student and faculty exhibitions and education component)

Winthrop University (student and faculty exhibitions and NextWave Festival)

College of Charleston (student and faculty exhibitions and NextWave Festival)

Augusta State University (faculty exhibitions and NextWave Festival)

The Power Company (site-specific performance installation and education component)

ACCESSIBILITY

ARTISTS AND CURATORS | 1998 - 2004

One hundred thirteen artists have participated in Sumter's unique public art project since beginning in 1998. Artists have come from literally 'around the world' to take part in South Carolina's longest running series of exhibitions featuring installation art. Many of the participants are considered emerging artists and are destined to have an impact on both regional and national levels. The artists' visits to Sumter are often their first experience in the South and event organizers frequently receive letters acknowledging Sumter's hospitality and openness to new, cutting-edge art concepts.

Eve a la Carte, 1998

Peggy Chilcutt
Marge Cowles
Janette Grassi
Martha Greenway
Doni Jordan
Rose Metz
Tracy Quinn
Rebecca Schlager
Mariah Kirby Smith
Lauren Taylor
Coleen Yates
Peggy Chilcutt, curator

Adam Meets Eve a la Carte, 1999

Randy Abbot
Luther Barnett
Freddie Bennett
Thomas Budden
Booth Chilcutt
Michael Duffy
Donny Floyd
Kevin Floyd
Mathew Johnson
Tom Prewett
Ivan Schlager
David Shoemaker
Peggy Chilcutt, curator

Installations on Main, 1999

Freddie Bennett
Virginia Casey
Eric Miller
Victor Pagona
Leslie Rech
Chris Robinson
Jeremy Vaughan
Norwood Vivano
Anne Boudreau, curator

Installations on Main, 2000

Freddie Bennett
Michael Bixler
Beau Bonnoitt
Virginia Casey
Marie Cheek
Carissa Doying Cuny
Jeremy Davis
Anneliese Dehner
Dawn Martin Dickens
Michael Dickens
Karen Greene Frazier
Colin Leipelt
Eric Miller
Marcelo Novo
Janet Orselli
W. Scotty Peek
Katherine Perry
Leslie Rech
Chris Robinson
Renee Rouillier
Lang Sheorn
Stephen Slappe
Jeremy Vaughan
Bernadette Vielbig
Anne Boudreau, curator

Accessibility, 2001

Beau Bonnoitt
Thomas Budden
Barry Jones
Laura Kissel
Jennifer Laffoon
Robert Lyon
Mark McLeod
Linda McCune
Marcelo Novo
Janet Orselli
Leslie Rech
Billy Renkle
Virginia Scotchie
Loren Schwerd
Tom Stanley
Bernadette Vielbig
Jennifer Wallace
Chris Robinson, curator

Accessibility, 2002

Stephen Crall
Jeremy Davis
Adrian Gollner
Becky Hall
Barry Jones
Kerry Keown
Young Kim
Rocky Lewycky
Linda McCune
Eric Miller
Joseph Milutis
Jane Orselli
W. Scotty Peek
Black Praytor
Leslie Rech
Billy Renkl
Mary Robinson
Renee Rouillier
Ton Sturdevant
Chris Robinson, curator

Accessibility - From the Outside In, 2003

Tova Beck-Friedman
Mary Giehl
Kurt Gohde
Lori Goodman
Hyomyung Kang
Thelma Mathais
Kaoru Motomiya
Jennifer Pepper
Yumiko Yamazaki
Jane Ingram Allen, curator

Accessibility - Space Questions: Art, Nature and Culture in South Carolina, 2004

Shawn Cassidy
Jiyoung Chae
Pearl Fryar
Larry Merriman
Jennifer Pepper
Brian Rust
Loren Schwerd
Charlie Holmes, curator